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Producing and Reproducing Local Maps: The Example of Amiens¹

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The *Archives communales* of Amiens, a town bordering the River Somme in northern France, preserves a unique series of post-mortem (probate) inventories starting in 1503.² As a part of specific legal procedures concerning wills and inheritances, the makers of these inventories listed, room by room, the moveable goods as they were found in the homes of several of the town's inhabitants a few days after their passing. The Amiens inventories were explored by Alfred Labarre, who studied the books owned by the inhabitants of Amiens during the sixteenth century.³ However, the wealth of historical information in these inventories can be used for further social and spatial analyses of the religious reading cultures of Amiens's urban society in the early sixteenth century, since most inventories provide precise information about the street where the house of the deceased person was situated, and, if present, its signboard (*enseigne*).

¹ The research for this article has been financed by a grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) for the research project "Cities of Readers: Religious Literacies in the Long Fifteenth Century" (2015-2019), carried out at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. The GIS-based maps discussed here were created for my article "City of Lay Readers: A Spatial Approach to Bible Reading by the Laity in Pre-Reformation Amiens (c. 1400-1522)" in *Renaissance-Humanismus, Bibel und Reformbewegungen des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts und ihre Bedeutung für das Werden der Reformation, Refo500 Academic Studies*, ed. Hans Selderhuis, Marinus Lange van Ravenswaay (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

² Amiens, *Archives communales*, série FF.

³ Alfred Labarre, *Le livre dans la vie amiénoise du seizième siècle. L'enseignement des inventaires après décès du XVIe siècle* (Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1971).

Below are reproduced the spatial indications for sixteen private houses in Amiens, as given in inventories covering the period 1503-1522. These inventories reveal where the Bible, translated in full or in fragments into French, was present. Although the inventories are surprisingly detailed, they do not allow us to pinpoint precise locations:

- A. *Dans la maison de la Rose, devant l'église Notre-Dame* (1503; FF 154/2): Ysabeau Avrillier, wife of Robert de Louvencourt;
In the house of the Rose, facing Our Lady's cathedral;
- B. *En une maison devant l'église Notre-Dame d'Amiens, à l'enseigne du Noir Mouton* (1509; FF 155/1 and 1515; FF 159/1): Jeanne le Scellier, wife of Antoine Le Vasseur, merchant;
In a house facing the Our Lady's cathedral of Amiens, with the sign of the Black Sheep;
- C. *Dans une maison Rue de la Draperie*⁴ (1514; FF 158/1): Jean Rimache, merchant;
In a house in Mercer's Street;
- D. *En une maison Rue Neuve* (1517; FF 160/2): Martin Boucher, lawyer;
In a house in New Street;
- E. *En une maison pres du Kay, a l'enseigne de la Nef d'argent* (1517; FF 160/10): Guillaume Blanchaux, merchant;
In a house near the docks, at the sign of the Silver Ship;
- F. *En une maison a lebranchement de la Rue des tripes* (1517; FF 160/14): Pierre de Coyn, mercer;
In a house at the forking of Tripe Street;
- G. *En une maison près de l'église Saint-Martin* (1518; FF161/15): Antoine de Cocquerel, procurator/lawyer;
In a house near Saint Martin's church;
- H. *En une maison à l'enseigne du Plat d'étain* (1518; FF 161/17): Jean Matissart, merchant;⁵
In a house at the sign of the Tin Plate;
- I. *En la rue appelee basse Rue Nostre Dame* (1518; FF 162/3): Jean du Peutel, occupation unknown, not very wealthy;
In a street called Lower Street of Our Lady;
- J. *En une maison près du Beffroi* (1519; FF 162/23): Jacqueline Martin, widow of Jean Forestier l'ainé, furrier;
In a house near the Belfry;

⁴ This street has been renamed Rue Saint-Martin.

⁵ Later sources show that this house was situated in the Haute Rue Notre-Dame.

- K. *En une maison, lieu et tenement seant Rue Saint-Jaques* (1519; FF 163/31): Nicolas Caignet, mayor of Amiens;
In a house and dependent land situated in Saint James's Street;
- L. *En une maison devant l'église Saint-Germain* (1520; FF 164/9): Marie Senescal, wife of Leurens Judas, bourgeois;
In a house facing Saint Germain's Church;
- M. *En une maison rue de Guyenne devant le moulin d'Adrien Bade* (1521; FF 166/14): Nicole de Blangy, priest;
In a house in Guyenne Street facing Adrien Bade's mill;
- N. *En une maison sur l'eau de Merderon* (1521; FF 166/20): Marguerite le Sellier, widow of Guillaume Hobe;
In a house on the water of the Merderon (the foul sewer);
- O. *En la maison du Blanc Cherf, Rue du Beffroi* (1522; FF 169/13): Marie Garnier, wife of Guillaume le Mattre l'ainé, bourgeois and merchant;
In the house of the White Stag, Belfrey Street;
- P. *En une maison, lieu, pourprins et tenement seant en ceste ville d'Amiens* (1522; FF 172/4): Colaye de Vaux, wife of Nicolas Obry, shoemaker;
In a house and fenced plot of land situated in this town of Amiens.

These spatial indications for the presence of the French vernacular Bible in the cityscape of fifteenth-century Amiens are important sources for our research project "Cities of Readers: Religious Literacies in the Long Fifteenth Century." One of the main goals of our research is to produce a spatial analysis of religious reading cultures of lay people living in the towns of northern France and the southern Low Countries. A key theoretical notion at the basis of our research is Christian Jacob's "*lieux de savoir*," "places of knowledge": physical and conceptual places where knowledge is produced, stored, consulted, and/or transmitted.⁶ Following Jacob, we see the private homes mentioned above, where complete and partial Bibles in French were present, as places of knowledge. It is our expectation that plotting places of religious knowledge on a map by making use of digital GIS mapping tools will be a first step towards a deeper understanding of the spatial dynamics of the dissemination of religious knowledge in the urban landscapes of

⁶ Christian Jacob, ed., *Lieux de savoir*, 2 vols. (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007-2011).

late-medieval and early modern Europe. It should be noted, however, that with spatial dynamics we do not only refer to geographical space, but also to social and conceptual spaces produced by societies, as suggested in the classical study by Henri Lefebvre.⁷



Figure 1 Amiens in 1944-1945. Photo: public domain: cheznazus.fr.

Although we have this rich source material from Amiens, there is, nevertheless, a huge problem: almost all of medieval Amiens was destroyed during World War I and World War II, and even more during the 1950s and 1960s by the post-war Modernist reconstructions and the demand for new infrastructure to accommodate motorized traffic. Photographs taken shortly after 1944 show that the existing streets and houses were completely erased to create an empty surface for a newly built, modern Amiens (**Fig. 1**). As a consequence, not a single one of the houses mentioned above has survived. On top

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

of this, the historical system of parcels has been altered profoundly, the grid of streets has been transformed, and several of the waterways in the northern part of town, where the watermills were situated, have been filled up.

In this paper, I discuss how historical maps can help us recreate digitally the spatial characteristics of a lost medieval town and how this information can be instrumental in understanding the spatial dynamics of religious knowledge transfer.⁸ Historical maps can help us reconstruct the exact dimensions and layout of late medieval Amiens, but they also represent historical conceptualizations and experiences of urban spaces that are as informative as exact, mathematical measurements.

Although the term “spatial turn” has already become a cliché, spatial approaches have gained momentum in the humanities, including historical research into the Middle Ages.⁹ Building on Lefebvre’s dictum that spaces are produced by societies, Marc Boone and Martha Howell have suggested recently that this approach entails

asking how space was perceived and used in everyday life, giving specific spaces cultural, social, and political coherence (“le perçu”); how it was represented or theorized, thus encoded in symbols, maps, and laws (“le conçu”); and how it was imagined, in effect the result of the dialectical relation between the perceived and the represented but separate from them (“le vécu”).¹⁰

⁸ For the emergence of urban maps in France, see Monique Pelletier and Henriette Ozanne, *Portraits de la France: les cartes, témoins de l’histoire* (Paris: Hachette/BNF, 1995), 5-91; Monique Pelletier, *Cartographie de la France et du monde de la Renaissance au siècle des Lumières* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2002,) 45-80.

⁹ Angelo Torre, “Un ‘tournant spatial’ en histoire? Paysages, regards, ressources,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 63, no. 5 (2008): 1127-44.

¹⁰ Marc Boone and Martha C. Howell, “Introduction” in *The power of space in late medieval and early modern Europe: the cities of Italy, Northern France and the Low Countries*, eds. Marc Boone and Martha C. Howell (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 1-10, at p. 3. For good introductions into spatial approaches for medieval studies, see also Peter Arnade, Martha Howell, and Walter Simons, “The Productivity of Urban Space in the Late Medieval Urban North,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2002): 515-48; Meredith Cohen and Fanny Madeline, eds., *Space in the Medieval West: Places, Territories, and Imagined Geographies* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

The represented and encoded spaces on maps are important here. Keith Lilley has suggested earlier that the use of “multiple mappings” that were produced throughout the centuries can be informative about “multiple perspectives on place.”¹¹ Even imprecise and subjective mappings express “how urban spaces are experienced and understood.”¹² All products of mapping activities, including modern reconstructions and digital maps, “are simply different means of (re)producing urban space(s)” that can help us understand how urban spaces were seen, experienced, and understood in the past.¹³ Unfortunately, most historical mappings of late medieval and sixteenth-century Amiens have been destroyed, just as the historical town has been. In this article, however, I discuss the rare examples that have come down to us, and show how these historical maps, together with modern reconstructions of late medieval Amiens, allow us to create a basis for a GIS-based spatial representation of places of knowledge and reading cultures of the Bible in the French/Picard vernacular.

Medieval Mappings of Amiens

Amiens is now a modestly sized provincial town in northern France, but during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the town was situated on the northern frontier of the French kingdom and, consequently, it was disputed territory, necessitating several fortification campaigns, and the town witnessed several violent and destructive military

¹¹ Keith D. Lilley and Gareth Dean, “A silent witness? Medieval urban landscapes and unfolding their mapping histories,” *Journal of Medieval History* 41.3 (2015): 273-91, at p. 291.

¹² Keith D. Lilley, “Urban Mappings: Visualizing Late Medieval Chester in Cartographic and Textual Form” in *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place and Identity in Chester, c. 1200-1600*, ed. Catherine A. M. Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), 19-41, at p. 30.

¹³ Lilley, “Urban Mappings,” 38.

conflicts during the Hundred Year's War.¹⁴ Culturally speaking, Amiens was a meeting ground and melting pot of French and Flemish cultures.¹⁵

The earliest cartographical evocation of Amiens dates from the middle of the thirteenth century, and it contradicts modern ideas about the symbolic character of medieval cartography. It can be found in the prologue to a Latin text entitled *Biblionomia*, written around the middle of the thirteenth century by Richard de Fournival, canon in the famous cathedral of Amiens:

Ambianis, secundum longitudinem quidem distat ab Occidente gradibus quadraginta et minutis triginta, ita videlicet quod ejus media dies est spacium trium horarum equalium et decem et octo minutorum unius hore post mediam diem civitas Aryn, que est in medio mundi sita, id est sub equatore diei posita, distans equaliter ab Oriente et Occident habitabilis hujus nostre polum septemtrionalem protense.¹⁶

According to its longitudinal position, Amiens is situated at forty degrees and thirty minutes to the west; which means that its noon takes place three hours and eighteen minutes after noon in the town of Aryn, that is situated in the middle of the world, on the equator and at an equal distance between east and west. The habitable part of the globe in which Aryn is situated stretches out until our North Pole.

This mathematical positioning of the Amiens, largely relying on Arabic cosmographical and astronomical science, is a huge technical and intellectual accomplishment, but not very helpful to our understanding of the internal urban structure of the town. However, in one phrase, the town of Amiens is mentioned together with the sacred Indian town

¹⁴ Nathalie Baudous-Jung, "La géographie militaire de l'échevinage d'Amiens d'après ses comptabilités (1380-1435)" in *La géographie militaire de la Picardie: actes du colloque (Amiens, 15 mai 2004)*, eds. Philippe Boulanger and Philippe Nivet (Amiens: Encreage, 2006) 9-16; Didier Bayard, "Amiens," *Revue archéologique de Picardie. Numéro spécial* 16 (1999): 199-214.

¹⁵ Susy Nash, *Between France and Flanders: Manuscript Illumination in Amiens in the Fifteenth Century* (London: British Library, 1999).

¹⁶ Léopold Delisle, *Le Cabinet des manuscrits*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1874), 520-521.

Aryn, supposedly situated in the middle of the habitable earth, as was known from Indian and Arabic cartography; this is a rhetorical suggestion of the exceptionality of Amiens.¹⁷ In *Biblionomia*, Richard de Fournival described his hometown of Amiens as the location of his impressive library of 162 books. He introduced his library by making use of the metaphor of an orchard where the people of the town could come and find knowledge in order to feed their intellect: a very open and welcoming “*lieu de savoir*” in Amiens as early as the thirteenth century. After Richard’s death, his book collection was incorporated in the library of the Sorbonne in Paris, but Amiens was not devoid of books, because other books and libraries continued to be accessible.

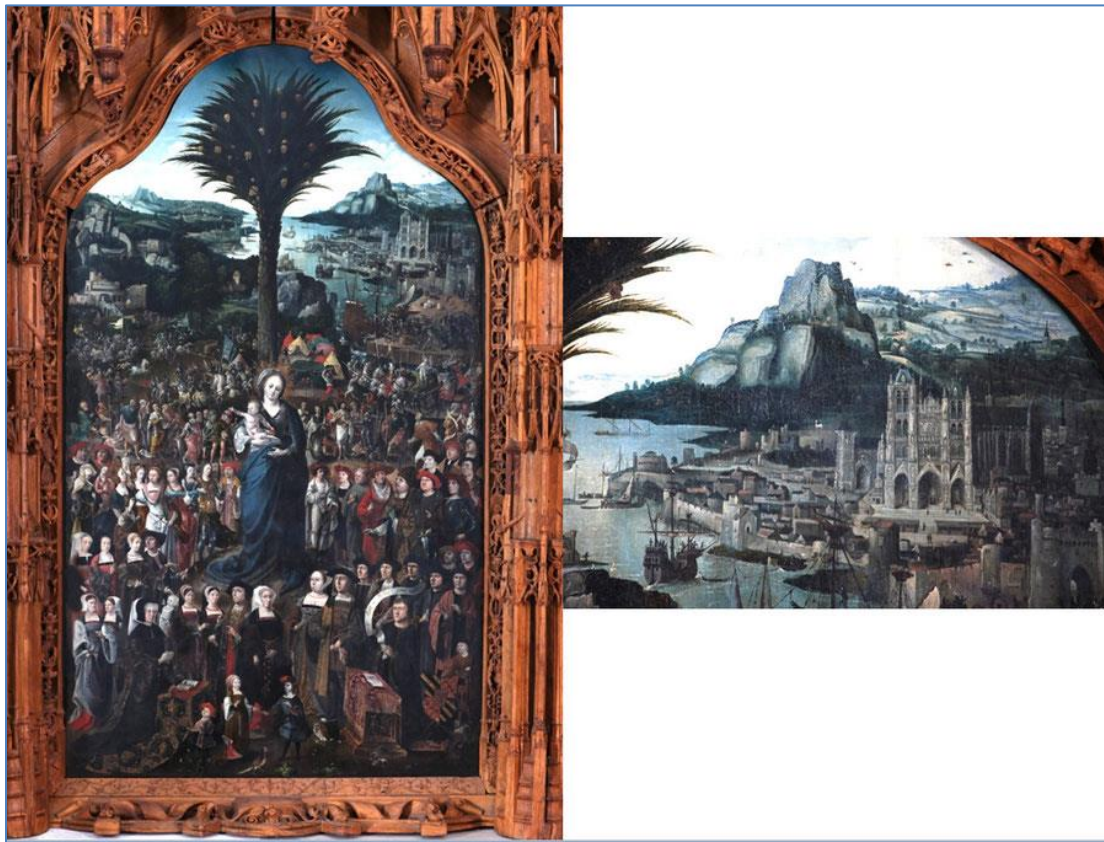


Figure 2 Painting for the confraternity Notre-Dame-du-Puy (1521). Musée de Picardie, Amiens. Photo: public domain, www.amis-musee-abbeyville.fr.

¹⁷ Raymond P. Mercier, “Geodesy” in *The history of cartography, vol. 2.1: Cartography in the traditional Islamic and South Asian societies*, eds. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 175-88, at p. 175. Knowledge about Aryn (actually Ujjain) passed to Western Europe through the astronomical tables established by al-Khwarazmi in Muslim Spain.

A rare surviving early visual reference to Amiens can be found in one of the paintings made for the literary confraternity of Notre-Dame-du-Puy (**Fig. 2**).¹⁸ One of the main activities of this confraternity was an annual poetry competition in which members from all social levels participated, from pastry bakers to canons and bishops. The winning poem would be copied on parchment and hung in the cathedral, together with a painting visualizing the metaphorical imagery of the poem. The painting accompanying the winning poem "*Palme eslute du Sauveur pour victoire*" ("Palmtree Elected by the Savior for Victory") from the year 1521 depicts in the left upper corner the emblematic cathedral of Amiens and the adjoining collegiate church of Saint-Firmin-le-Confesseur, surrounded by an imagined town and river valley. Although this is not an exact representation of the geographical and architectural reality of early sixteenth-century Amiens, it is still informative about the features that were perceived as characteristic for Amiens: a walled and prosperous town bordering a river where ships full of merchandise sail and dock in the harbor. The town is dominated by its impressive cathedral and includes many smaller religious buildings. As we will see, these features are also present in other representations of Amiens.

No other medieval mappings of Amiens than Richard de Fournival's description and the painting made for the confraternity of Notre-Dame-du-Puy have come to light so far, but in the sixteenth century several painters were active in the town, and the council of aldermen regularly commissioned maps of the town and its surroundings from them. The *Archives communales* in Amiens also preserve a rich collection of accounts of the aldermen's deliberations, of which Georges Durand has presented an overview of the maps commissioned by them during the sixteenth century.¹⁹ These mappings were

¹⁸ Gérard Gros, *Le poète, la Vierge et le prince du Puy: étude sur les Puys marials de la France du Nord du XIV^e siècle à la Renaissance* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992).

¹⁹ Georges Durand, "Peintres d'Amiens au XVI^e siècle," *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie* 31 (1924-25): 619-728.

mostly related to territorial disputes, for instance between the town and the communities of canons in Amiens about the ownership of water mills and of the fertile islands in the valley of the River Somme with vegetable gardens (*hortillonages*), to the west and east of the town.

But the most important reason for the commissions of maps of Amiens was the strategic position of the town on the northern frontier of the French kingdom. Amiens was disputed territory: during the Hundred Year's War, the town was threatened by several armed conflicts, requiring new fortifications to protect its recently occupied suburbs to the south of the old city center. The town had even passed between 1433 and 1477 from the French crown to the Dukes of Burgundy, becoming part of the Low Countries instead of France. In the turmoil of the French Wars of Religion during the later sixteenth century and after the last of its Protestant Huguenot inhabitants had been expelled or converted by force in 1585, Amiens was firmly on the side of the Catholic League. As a consequence, the town was very reluctant to accept the formerly Protestant Henri IV as the new King of France in 1589, and the seizure of the town by troops from the Spanish Netherlands in 1597 might not have been entirely without consent from the inhabitants of Amiens. Henri only succeeded in reconquering Amiens after a siege of six months.²⁰

It is not possible to reproduce here all references retraced by Durand in the accounts of the town council, but a representative sample of them is instructive of the intensive mapping activities in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Amiens:

- In 1495, because of a conflict between the town of Amiens and the famous Benedictine Abbey of Corbie, the painter Jacques Platel was asked to make "*deux figures de partie de la rivière de Somme environ les villages de Long et Longuet*" (two figurative representations of the stretch of the River Somme at the height of the villages Long et Longuet; forty kilometers west of Amiens). Strictly speaking this

²⁰ Albéric de Calonne, *Histoire de la ville d'Amiens*, vol. 2 (Amiens: Piteux frères, 1900), 160-232.

is not a map of Amiens, but it is an early sign of cartographic and land surveying activities.

- In 1506-1507 the town council ordered the painter Andrieu de Moncheaux to decorate the monumental *Belle-Croix*, marking a well on the "*Marché au bled*," with painting and gilding. In 1518, the same painter was paid for having "*tiré et pourtret en parchemin le signe de la forteresse*" (made a representation on parchment of the outlines of the fortifications). After this commission, several others followed; for instance, in 1520-21 for "*deux pourtraicts du bollevert en platteforme*" (two ground plans of the stronghold; *bollevert* derives from the Dutch/Flemish word *bolwerk*).
- Andrieu's son, Antoine de Moncheaux, seems to have had the same cartographic and geometrical skills as his father, because he received similar commissions. For instance, in 1542 the canons from the Abbey of Saint-Jean just outside Amiens wanted to construct a corn mill. In order to document and protect the town's interests, Antoine was asked to make "*une figure des maretz communs de la ville*" ("an image of the common marshlands" of Amiens) near the abbey.
- The painter Zacharie de Celers was even more active as a mapmaker and surveyor. In the year 1549, the accounts of the town council include a payment to him for a map of Picardie: "*A Zacharie Le Seellier, peintre, la somme de quatre l., dix s., pour une quarte par luy faicte en parchemin du pays de Picardye retenue en l'hostel commun de ladite ville, pourservir en icelluy*" ("To Zacharie Le Seellier, painter, the amount of four pounds, ten sous, for a map on parchment made by him of the land of Picardie, kept in the town hall in order to be used there"). In 1554, Zacharie was paid for "*ung pourtraict de ladite ville d'Amiens, ensemble de l'ordre du corps de garde et réveil que puis peu de temps l'on faict de nuict sur la forteresse de ladite ville*" ("a representation of aforementioned town Amiens, together with the lay out of the guard's house and the night guard that is being held during night time on the fortifications of said town") that was intended to be given to the king Henri II of France, most likely as a proof of the town's engagement in protecting the kingdom's northern border. The records of the town's council show that Zacharie de Celers has made several other maps and that he was also active as a land surveyor.

None of the maps or visual representations commissioned by the aldermen of Amiens seem to have survived, but a very similar map (**Fig. 3**) on parchment is now kept in the



Figure 3 Map of Amiens and the hortillonages (1542; modern copy). Archives départementales de la Somme, Amiens. Photo: S.A.E. Molhoek.

<http://recherche.archives.somme.fr/ark:/58483/a011353927000AzA4i8>.

Archives départementales de la Somme.²¹ The map, with the south on top and dated 1542, is an impressive parchment scroll measuring two meters long and one meter high, representing the town with the fertile *hortillonages* situated to the east. An inscription

²¹ Amiens, Archives départementales de la Somme, RL90; 4G1266:
<http://recherche.archives.somme.fr/ark:/58483/a011353927000AzA4i8>.

contains the signature of “C. Lecaron,” who identifies himself as procurator of the chapter. This suggests that the map was probably intended to record precisely the position and dimensions of the vegetable gardens owned by the community of canons in Amiens, because these have been rendered in great detail. The urban structures of Amiens are, in contrast, highly approximate. The representation of the town is nevertheless very informative about historical conceptualizations of Amiens and its urban identity.

Firstly, the cathedral is the only architectural structure that has been rendered in great detail. The *belle croix* decorating one of the market squares, which was as we have seen decorated and gilded by Andrieu de Moncheaux in the early years of the sixteenth century, is also visually emphasized. Elements as these express the religious identity of the town. The market places have been depicted much larger than they were in reality, and this representation emphasizes the importance of commercial activities for the prosperity and identity of Amiens. The important north-south travel axis is rendered as a straight line, although, in reality, it is angled towards the west in the northern part of town. This representation probably reflects experiences of travel and transport through Amiens. The canals and waterways in the northern part of town have also been traced in a detailed manner, most notably the numerous water mills situated there. The community of canons in Amiens owned many of these mills, and this might be another explanation for the importance of this map for the commissioners. On the other hand, the northern part of Amiens was the industrial heart of the town, which assured much of its prosperity: the waterways running through the northern part of town, situated in the actual river valley, not only fueled the water mills, but they were also important for many water-consuming activities in Amiens’s woolen cloth production and dying industries. Emphasizing this, several ships are depicted sailing on the river Somme and docking in Amiens’s river harbors. The merchandise transported and loaded by them is another reference to the wealth of Amiens and its importance as a center of production and trade.

Secondly, more depictions and maps of Amiens must have existed, and occasionally a reference survives. For instance, in the seventeenth century, a merchant from Amiens, called Pagès, produced several hand-written volumes with descriptions of the monuments, streets and fortifications of the town as he saw and experienced them. Pagès also described a huge wall painting with a bird's eye view of Amiens in the great hall of the Hôtel de Ville (town hall), at that moment still mainly a sixteenth-century building. The painting must have been made after the siege of Amiens in 1597, because it includes the French king, Henri IV: "*On le voit représenté assis avec plusieurs personnes de sa cour, dans un beatteau sur la Somme*" (He can be seen represented sitting in a boat on the River Somme together with several members of his court).²² Above these figures a huge bird's eye view of Amiens was to be seen, because Pagès reports that he saw this depiction of Henri IV: "*a bas d'un grand plan géométrique de la ville d'Amiens, fait à vol d'oiseaux, de la longueur de huit à dix pieds sur cinq à six pieds de hauteur, dont les églises et batimens sont peints de coulleur naturelle*" ("below a huge geometrical plan of the town of Amiens, made from a bird's eye perspective, of eight to ten feet length and five to six feet height, of which the churches and buildings have been depicted in natural colors").²³ Unfortunately, this painting, too, has disappeared, because the Hôtel de Ville as Pagès visited it was demolished and rebuilt in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The mural painting in the Hôtel de Ville as Pagès saw it probably commemorated Henri IV's victory in the Siege of Amiens that he undertook after Spanish troops, coming from the Low Countries, penetrated into the town and occupied it in 1597.

A similar bird's eye view of Amiens can be found in a painting representing the siege of Amiens by Henri IV, now in the Musée de Versailles (**Fig. 4**). This painted view is not

²² Louis Douchet, ed., *Manuscrits de Pagès, marchand d'Amiens: écrits à la fin du 17^e et au commencement du 18^e siècle, sur Amiens et la Picardie* (Amiens: A. Caron, 1856) 1:537.

²³ Douchet, *Manuscrits de pagès*, 1:537.

an exact map based on a survey, but an imagined view epitomizing the most important features: a strongly fortified town with a cathedral-like building that does not reproduce the two characteristic towers and rose windows of the original. Amiens is represented as a circular town, intersected by a river running from the left to the right and a vertical straight road.



Figure 4 Anonymous, *Siege of Amiens by Henri IV, 1590*, Musée de Versailles. Photo: public domain, Wikipedia.org.

The siege of Amiens was a highly mediatized event that prompted a lively interest throughout Europe, and several printers made use of the occasion to make a profit by editing “news maps.” An undated French print, engraved by “Aluberti,” shows the siege of Amiens as it might have been seen in bird’s eye view from the north (**Fig. 5**): a strongly

fortified town, characterized by many waterways running through its northern part, the cathedral, churches, market squares adorned with monumental crosses, and the north-south road axis. Although the depicted cathedral does not look like Amiens's Notre-Dame at all and the parish church of Saint-Leu is erroneously named Saint-Remy (number 4 on the map), this engraving epitomizes very similar characteristics to the mappings discussed earlier.

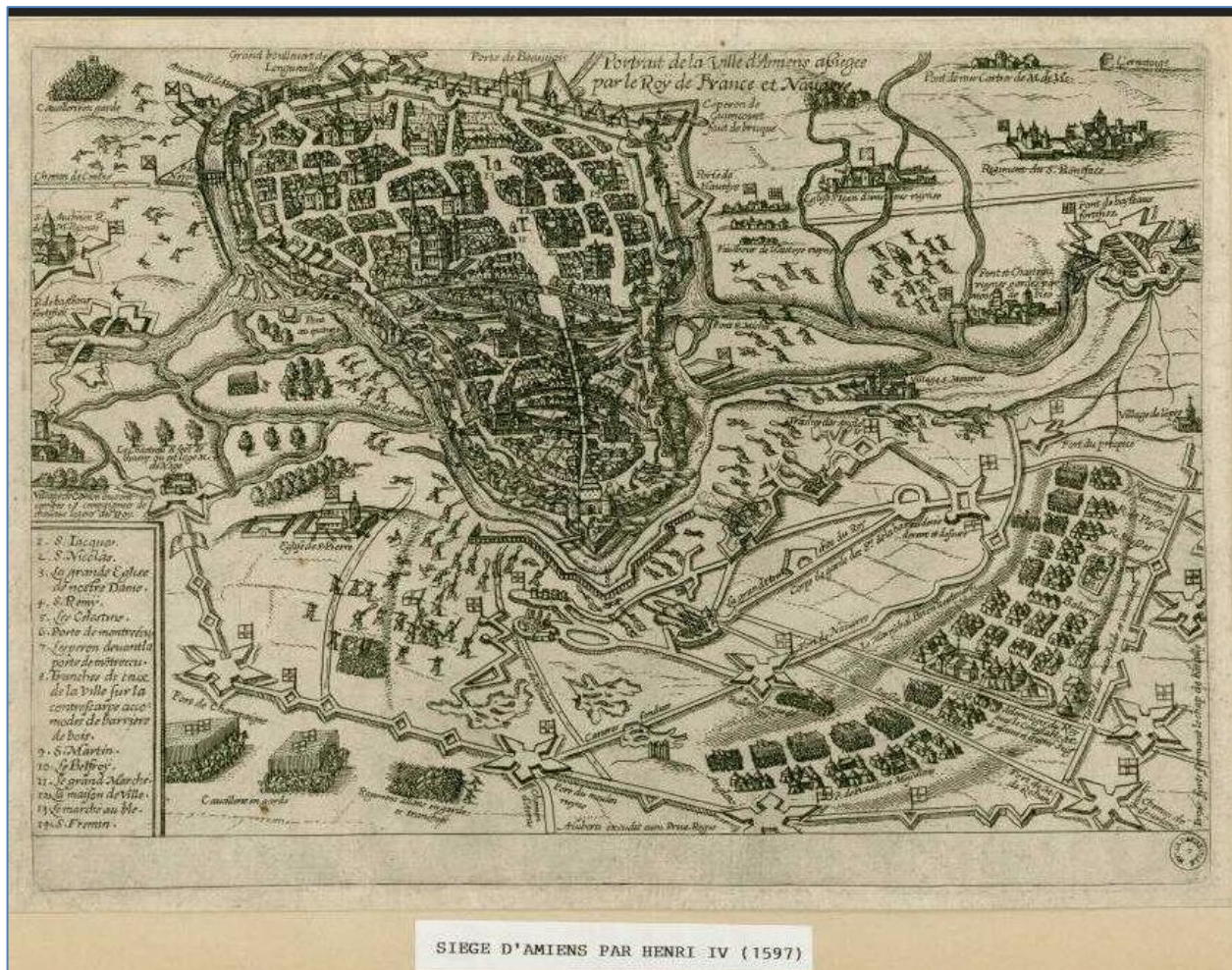


Figure 5 Siege of Amiens in 1597, engraved by Aluberti. Photo: public domain, www1.arkhenum.fr

The siege of Amiens was also reproduced by Frans Hogenberg in an undated printed “news map” with inscriptions in German. Here Amiens is represented incorrectly as an almost circular, heavily fortified town situated on two sides of a broad river (**Fig. 6**). This

representation is only slightly reminiscent of Amiens with a cathedral that stands out, a water mill, and important city gates in the north and the south. Although largely imagined, this is a shorthand version of Amiens's main characteristics; even in this form it will have sufficed for German readers interested in news about the siege.



Figure 6 Siege of Amiens in 1597, German news print. Photo: public domain, wikipedia.org.

Henri IV's siege of the town in 1597 was also rendered in an engraving by Claude Châtillion, who identified himself as "*topographe du roy*," (**Fig. 7**). This unusual mapping, a view from the west, is a fairly accurate rendering of the "skyline" of late sixteenth-century Amiens, with its fortifications, the River Somme and the other smaller waterways running through the northern part of town, the cathedral and its rose windows, the

collegiate church of Saint-Nicolas to the right and the Belfry in between them. The parish church of Saint-Leu (the first larger structure to the left of the river), however, seems displaced and its features slightly altered.²⁴ Unlike the maps that give a top-down view, this particular mapping by Claude Châtillon also visualizes another important feature of Amiens: the old town near the cathedral is situated on higher ground than the northern part of town, which is in the actual river valley. I will return to this important aspect below.



Figure 7 Claude Châtillon, view of the siege of Amiens from the West. Photo: public domain, www1.arkhenum.fr

Finally, although François de Belleforest's impressive atlas, *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde*, first published in 1575, does not contain a visual map of Amiens, the author does describe the town in a textual mapping. Belleforest first insists on the classical origins of the town, which was allegedly founded by Caesar and the Romans:

[P]our se fortifier contre les Belges donnerent commencement a la cité d'Amiens la posans (ainsi qu'elle est a present) sur la riviere de Some et par la division des canaux d'icelle, de maniere que le fleuve la ceint de tous costez, et la fait

²⁴ The parish church of Saint-Leu is one of the rare medieval structures to have survived (albeit not entirely in its original form). Châtillon's view has been checked against the view of Amiens on the lower border Charles Desborde's map of Amiens made in 1700 (fig. 7). I have also used pre-1914 photo's and engravings of characteristic architectural structures, for instance of the collegiate church of Saint-Nicolas (A. Le Prince, 1851; see: http://www1.arkhenum.fr/bm_abbeyville_macqueron/_app/visualisation.php?id=4088).

*presqu'insulaire, et que pour cette cause elle fut ditte Ambianum ou Amiaquensis, comme environne et ceinte d'eaux.*²⁵

[I]n order to build a fortress against the Belgians they founded the town of Amiens by placing it (as it is nowadays) on the River Somme and because of the widespread waterways of its canals, resulting in the river encircling it from all sides and rendering the town almost a peninsula, and for this reason the town was called *Ambianum* or *Amiaquensis*, because it is surrounded by water.

The defensive features of Amiens, which was on the border of the kingdom, are once more emphasized, when Belleforest qualifies the town as “*rempart et clef principale de France*” (“defense and principal key of France”).²⁶ The remainder of de Belleforest’s description is mainly concerned with the fidelity of the inhabitants to the French kings and with the bishops of Amiens since its first bishop, Saint Firmin the martyr.

The historical mappings presented here are instrumental in understanding how the urban space of Amiens was conceptualized in the past: a busy and prosperous commercial town situated on a navigable river with numerous fertile vegetable gardens, ships loading and off-loading merchandise in the river harbors, and several market squares situated at the crossroads of waterways and north-south overland traffic, connecting France and the Low Countries. Because of its situation and its prosperity, Amiens was also a coveted town and so was fiercely defended. Amiens was also represented as a religious town with a cathedral, where the important relic of the head of Saint John the Baptist was venerated; and included three other collegiate churches; a mass of religious houses, hospitals, and parish churches; as well as the Belle-Croix that was painted and gilded by Andrieu de Moncheaux (mentioned above). On the other hand, the representations discussed above

²⁵ François de Belleforest, *La cosmographie universelle de tout le monde* (Paris: Michel Sonnius, 1575) 1:378.

²⁶ Belleforest, *La cosmographie universelle*, 1:379.

A Spatial Analysis of the Presence of the Bible in French

A map of Amiens and its fortifications made in 1700 by Charles Desbordes was eventually the most useful source for recreating a map of late fifteenth-century Amiens (Fig. 8). Amiens's economic prosperity came to a standstill in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and for historical research this is a blessing in disguise, because the layout of the town hardly changed during these two centuries. Desbordes's map was especially instrumental in our retrieving the original grid of streets and markets, their historical names, waterways, as well as the locations of now-lost collegiate churches, parish churches, convents, and hospitals. It is interesting that this map, made with technically more advanced land surveying techniques and instruments, still represents the north-south axis running through the town as a straight line, although, in reality, the road through the northern part of town is angled almost 30 degrees towards the west.

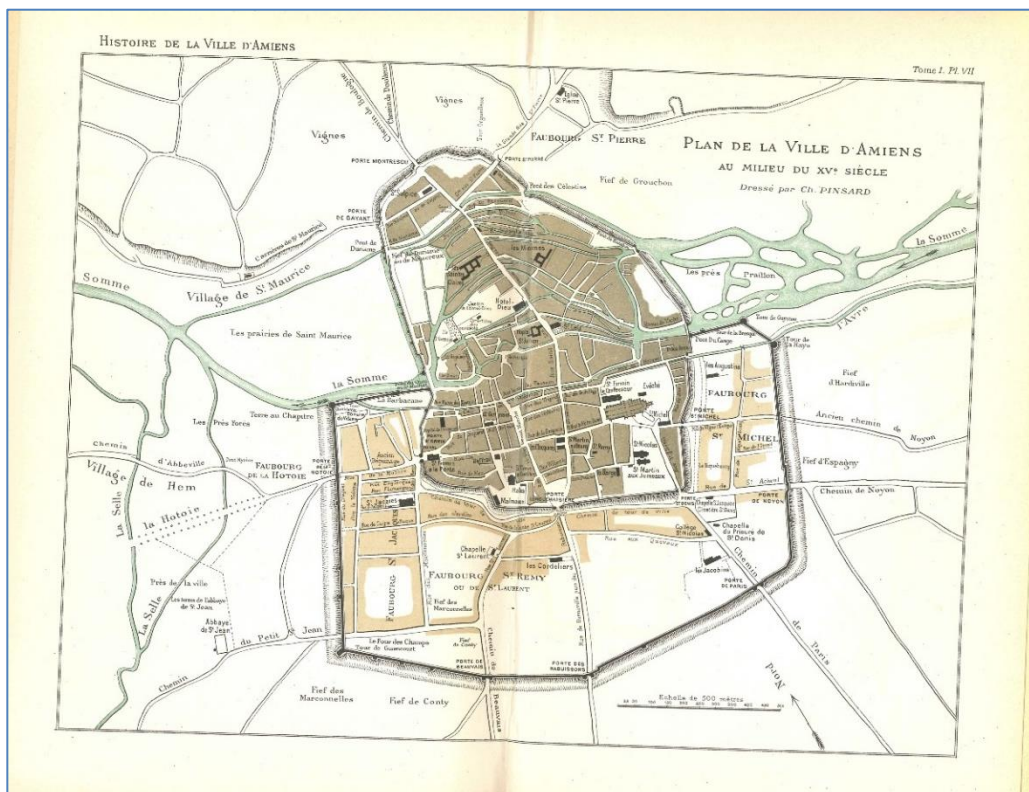


Figure 9 Reconstruction of fifteenth-century Amiens by Albéric de Calonne, *Histoire de la ville d'Amiens*, 3 volumes, Amiens, Piteux; Paris, Picard, 1899-1906. Photo: public domain.

With assistance from the technicians of the Geoservice of the University of Groningen, we georeferenced this map and, in combination with a map that represents a reconstruction of fifteenth-century Amiens made in the late nineteenth century for the history of Amiens written by Albéric de Calonne (**Fig. 9**), we created two GIS-maps:²⁷

- **Map 1: a GIS-based map with the locations of private owners of Bibles and biblical excerpts in French (Fig. 10)**

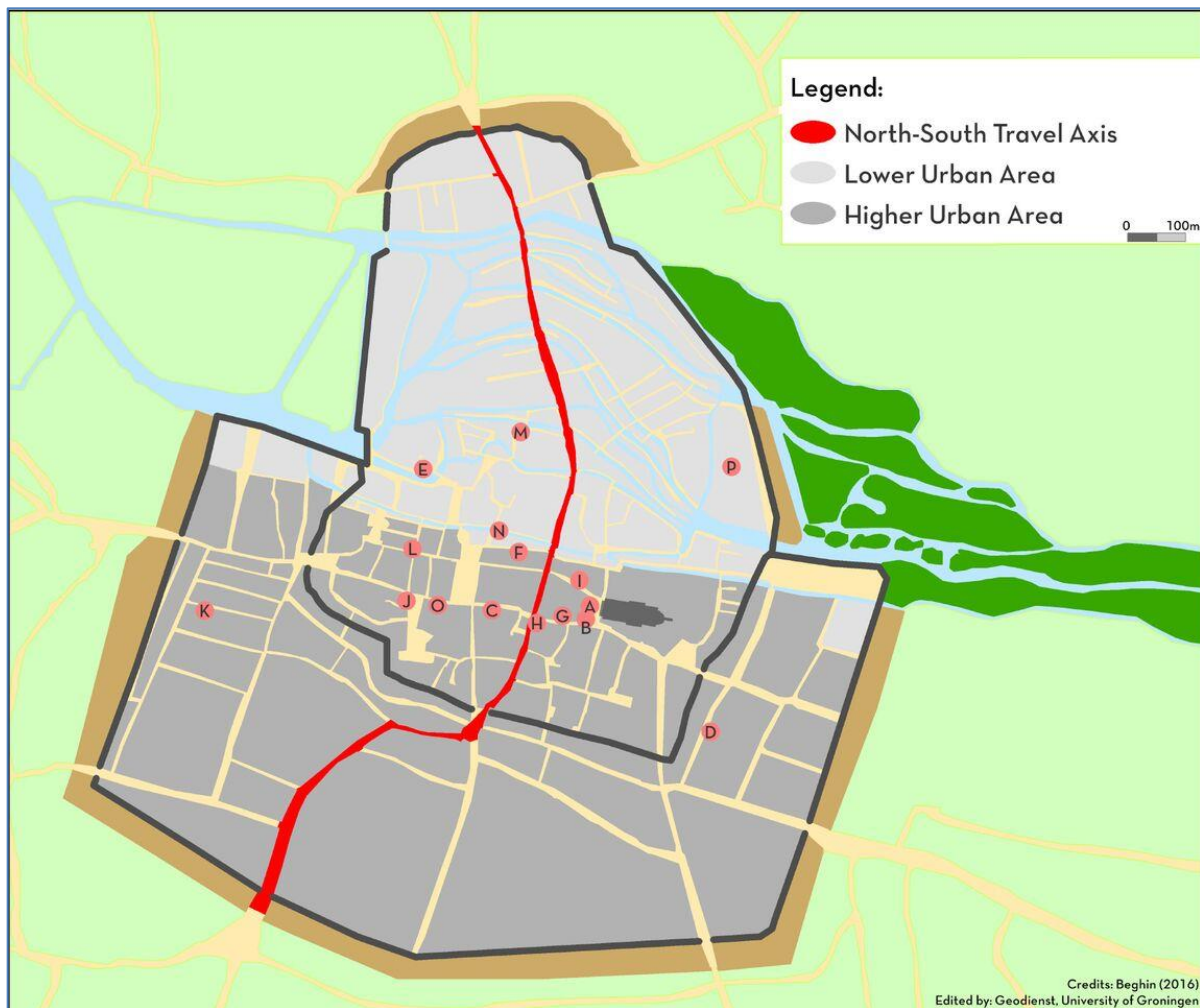


Figure 10 GIS-based map 1 with owners of the Bible in French in Amiens (1503-1522). Design: Geodienst, University of Groningen.

²⁷ de Calonne, *Histoire de la ville d'Amiens*, 1: n.p.

The locations of the private homes where books with biblical texts were present (as presented above) plotted on a map of early sixteenth-century Amiens visualizes the widespread and unproblematic presence of the vernacular Bible among lay people, well before the Reformation. There is a distinct concentration of books with biblical texts in the older part of town near the cathedral and the Belfry. This area was quite economically diverse: here lived wealthy merchants, but also artisans and people of very modest means. Two such books were present in houses in the suburban area to the south, where several wealthy inhabitants lived in spacious and luxurious manor-like houses with ornamental gardens. Likewise, the two dots in this area indicate the house of a mayor of Amiens, Nicolas Caignet (K) and a lawyer, Antoine Boucher (D).

Many fewer dots are present in the northern part of town. One important feature of Amiens is not visible at all on most of the historical maps discussed above: the old town center with the cathedral is situated on an elevated riverbank of the River Somme that rises ten to fifteen meters higher than the northern part of town in the actual river bed, actually a wetland area. This is indicated on the map with a lighter shade of grey. This northern part of town was more industrial, with water mills, many waterways and canals used for polluting industries, such as butchers, parchment makers, leather workers, washing and dying of wool and woolen cloth, and the production of a blue pigment from dyer's woad that also involved the use of quantities of water and urine. Most houses were situated near the old town center and along the north-south travel axis. The inhabitants were mainly, but not uniquely, artisans and manual workers of very modest means. Only four houses with French biblical texts can be situated in this area, suggesting that most people living in the northern part of town were too poor to own books, or to have an inventory made of their possessions, and, possibly, that more people in this area were illiterate.

On the other hand, the presence of a few Bible-based books in private houses in this part of town suggests strongly that manual work and Bible reading were not separate

activities, but that work alternated with biblical and religious reading practices. For instance, the poor widow, Marguerite le Sellier (N), who lived in a house bordering the insalubrious foul sewer (*"l'eau de merderon"*) and who, judging by the objects mentioned in the inventory, was active as a wool spinner and dyer, surprisingly also owned a Book of Hours and an old and heavily used Bible in French. Colaye de Vaux and her husband Nicolas Obry (P), working as a shoemaker, lived in a house on a fenced plot of land in an unspecified area of Amiens, without a proper street name. Because most leather-working artisans were located in the northern part of town, the house of Colaye de Vaux and Nicolas Obry was plotted in this area on the map as well. Although Colaye and Nicolas were only of a modest fortune, they still possessed two religious books: *A Golden Legend* and a Bible in French.

- **Map 2: Map 1 combined with institutions where books were probably present for consultation (Fig. 11)**

During the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, religious reading could be a private activity, but it was also frequently a collective activity: lay and religious people were encouraged to read books to illiterate people, often with indulgences specified as a reward.²⁸ The Bible in Latin and in French was also available, in complete form or in excerpts, in religious institutions with so-called common-profit libraries and books (often chained to protect them from theft) where the texts were freely accessible for consultation. Institutions also frequently had panels with prayers, psalms, or parts of the Bible in the French/Picard vernacular or in Latin, visible for all on the inside or the outside walls.²⁹

²⁸ See my *"Car Dieu veult estre serui te tous estaz."* Encouraging and Instructing Laypeople in French from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Sixteenth Century" in *Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed., Sabrina Corbellini, Margriet Hoogvliet and Bart Ramakers (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 111-40.

²⁹ See my *"Pour faire laies personnes entendre les hystoires des escriptures anciennes."* Theoretical Approaches to a Social History of Religious Reading in the French Vernaculars During the Late Middle Ages" in *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Later Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit and Awakening the Passion*, ed., Sabrina Corbellini (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 247-74.

Map 2 shows that, although people in the northern part of town did not own as many books with the biblical text in French as people in the southern, richer part of town, there were still several religious institutions that offered them access to the text of the Bible: parish churches, hospitals, Beguines, Franciscan tertiaries (*soeurs grises*), Poor Clares, Celestine monks, and Minim friars.

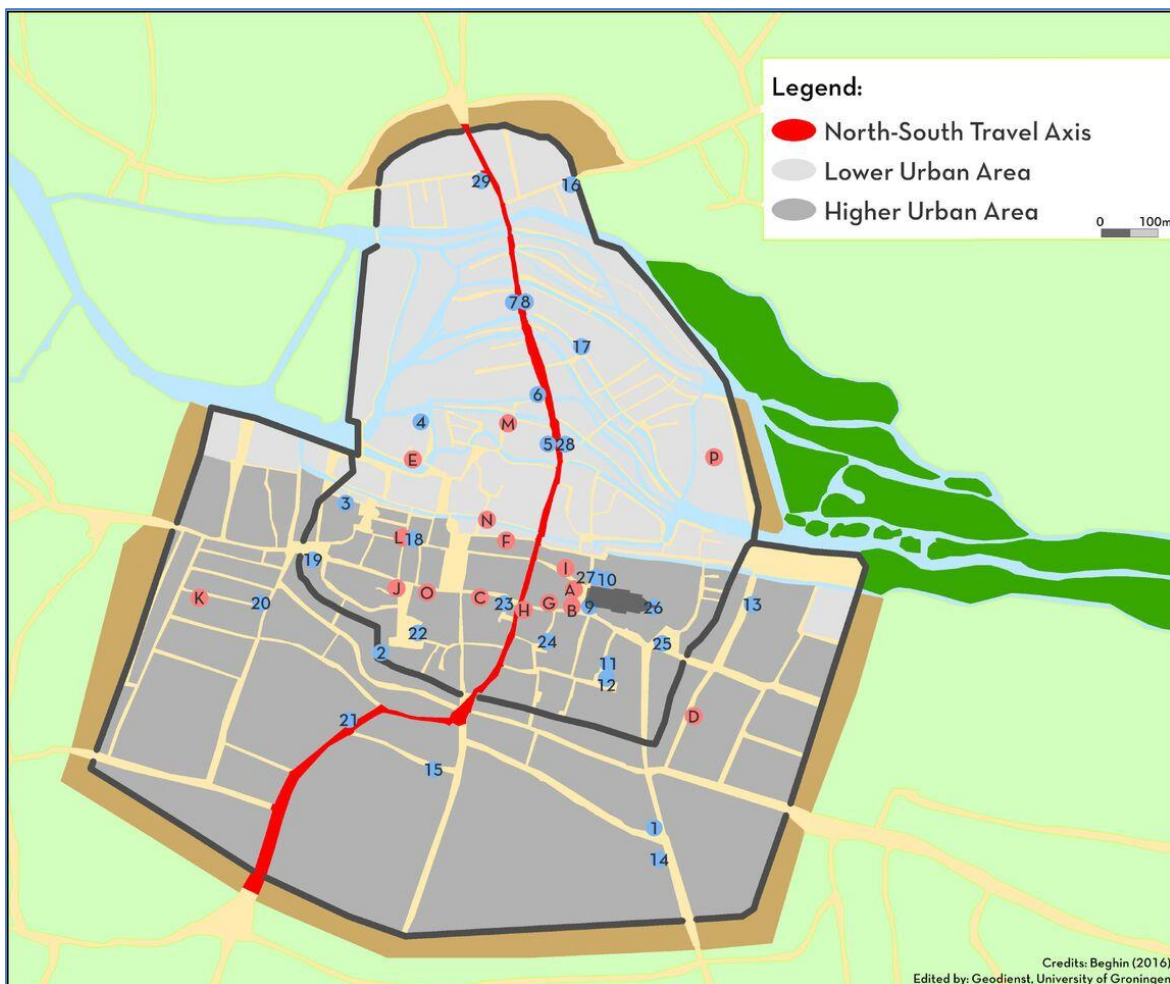


Figure 11 GIS-based map 2 with owners of the Bible in French in Amiens (1503-1523) and religious institutions. Design: Geodienst, University of Groningen.

Conclusion

The investigation into multiple mappings of Amiens made during the Middle Ages and especially the sixteenth century was fundamental for the reconstruction of the

original layout of its street network and for localizing with some degree of certainty the private homes where books with the biblical text in French were present in the period 1503-1522.

But the result is larger than a map alone. The townscape of Amiens is not a stage background against which history and human activity unfolded throughout the ages; its geomorphic, urban, and social particularities did interact with social processes and spatial dynamics of religious knowledge transfer. The site of Amiens has a number of specific natural features: surrounding low hills, higher riverbanks flanking the Somme riverbed with its waterways, wetlands, and fertile islands. The urban landscape of Amiens also includes several man-made characteristics: fortifications, waterways and canals, water mills, river harbors and docks, a network of streets and overland long-distance routes, market squares, buildings for religious and local political institutions, and, most numerous, a mass of houses providing shelter, living space, working space, and religious “*lieux de savoir*,” accessible for the townspeople.

Fernand Braudel addressed the agency of the geographical environment in his famous study of the Mediterranean in the age of Philip II.³⁰ His slightly deterministic approach was recently refined by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, who emphasize the importance of localized “microecologies” and their interactions: “A locality (a ‘definite place’) with a distinctive identity derived from the set of available productive opportunities and the particular interplay of human responses to them found in a given period.”³¹

³⁰ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 125-352.

³¹ Peregrine Horden, Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 80. For the interplay between humans, spaces and objects, see also: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 179-80.

As a logical consequence of this idea, the “*lieux de savoir*” in early sixteenth-century Amiens’ private homes are not just inert staple places of knowledge but connected spaces that contain and disseminate information.³² The particularities of the urban space of early sixteenth-century Amiens that were experienced physically and perceived conceptually—natural, geomorphic, architectural, commercial, political, religious, social, private, institutional—and people’s interactions with these particularities shaped the processes of knowledge transfer. Maps, old and new, are fundamental tools to get a deeper understanding of these processes.

Our investigation into spatial aspects of lay religious reading cultures in French/Picard will not stop after the production of these two GIS-based maps. The research team of “Cities of Readers” is currently working on new GIS-based maps with more information about the amounts of books, their contents, and the social position of the book owners, in Amiens and in other towns situated in the Low Countries. We are also hoping to visualize and to analyze the movement of religious knowledge from *lieux de savoir* into (or through) the social structures of late medieval Amiens. Ideally our map of Amiens 2.1 will also include information about social aspects, such as: the wealth of the households per fireplace (there are a few surviving accounts of tax contributions and tithes); social networks, such as the confraternity Notre-Dame-du-Puy in which lay people and ordained religious collaborated in the creation of religious poetry (we do have names of the authors who won the annual poetry competition, and some of them also occur in the post-mortem inventories); and social hotspots and meeting places where people would come together to meet and to exchange information, such as market squares, taverns, shops, chapels, and churches. 🐼

³² “Place and space” are not synonymous. Both terms are hotly debated theoretical concepts with multiple meanings, both in a geometrical and conceptual sense. For a discussion, see: Boone and Howell, *The Power of Space*. I am using space here in the sense of space of communication, or “the space of flows” as proposed by Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).